

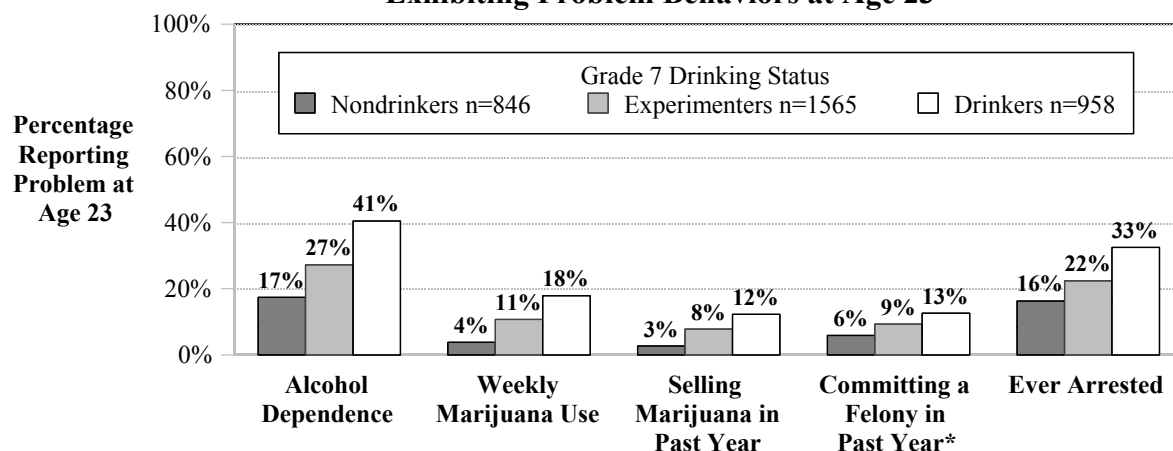
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Early Alcohol Users More Likely to Report Substance Use and Criminal Activity as Young Adults

Children that began drinking or experimenting with alcohol at or before 7th grade were more likely to report public health problems at age 23 than those who were nondrinkers in 7th grade, according to a longitudinal study conducted in California and Oregon. Less than one in five (17%) of seventh grade nondrinkers reported that they were alcohol dependent at age 23, compared to 27% of those who experimented with alcohol in seventh grade and 41% of seventh grade drinkers. Seventh graders who experimented with or used alcohol also were more likely to report smoking (data not shown), marijuana use, and involvement with criminal activities at age 23 (see figure below). These relationships remained even after controlling for gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental education, family structure, and other types of early adolescent substance use and problem behaviors. According to the authors, “Early drinkers do not necessarily mature out of a problematic lifestyle as young adults. Interventions for these high-risk youth should start early and address their other public health problems, particularly their tendency to smoke and use other illicit drugs” (p. 949).

Weighted Percentages of Grade 7 Nondrinkers, Experimenters and Drinkers Exhibiting Problem Behaviors at Age 23



*Felonies were defined as buying/selling/holding stolen goods, taking a joy ride without the vehicle owner's permission, breaking into property, arson or attempted arson.

NOTES: Nondrinkers never had a drink, not even a few sips. Experimenters drank less than three times in the past year, and not in the past month. Drinkers drank three or more times in the past year or drank in the past month. Subjects were assessed in grade 7, again at grade 12, and again at age 23.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Ellickson P.L., Tucker J.S., Klein D.J., “Ten-Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated With Early Drinking,” *Pediatrics* 111(5):949- 955, 2003. For more information contact Phyllis Ellickson phyllis_ellickson@rand.org.

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